Coelius Sedulius

(fl. First Half of the 5th Century)

BRIEFING

Sedulius (sometimes with the nomen Coelius or Caelius, both of doubtful authenticity) was a Christian poet during the first half of the 5th century.

BIOGRAPHY

Little is known about his life. The only trustworthy information, contained in his two letters to Macedonius, recounts that he devoted his early life, perhaps as a teacher of rhetoric, to secular literature. Late in life he converted to Christianity, or, if a Christian before, began to take his faith more seriously. One medieval commentary states that he resided in Italy. Isidore of Seville (c. 560 – 636) and the Gelasian decree refer to him as a presbyter.

WORKS

His fame rests mainly upon a long poem, *Carmen paschale*, based on the four gospels. In style a bombastic imitator of Virgil, he shows, nevertheless, a certain freedom in the handling of the Biblical story, and the poem soon became a quarry for the minor poets. His description of the Four Evangelists in *Carmen Paschale* became well-known; the English translation below is from Springer (2013, p. 21).

Original text	English translation
Hoc Matthaeus agens hominem generaliter implet;	Matthew plays the role of the whole human race;
Marcus tu alta fremit uox per deserta leonis;	Mark roars like the loud voice of a lion through the wilderness;
Iura sacerdotii Lucas tenet ore iuuenci;	Luke holds the office of the priesthood with the face of an ox;
More uolans aquilae uerbo petit astra Iohannes;	Flying like an eagle, John reaches for the stars with his word.

His other writings include an Abecedarian hymn in honour of Christ, *A solis ortus cardine*, consisting of twenty-three quatrains of iambic dimeters. This poem has partly passed into the Roman Rite liturgy, the first seven quatrains forming the Christmas carol "A solis ortus cardine", which has been translated into vernacular languages by, among many others, Martin Luther and Allan MacDonald. The Epiphany hymn, "Hostis Herodes impie"and "Veteris et novi Testamenti collatio" in elegiac couplets have also come down.

EDITIONS

- Faustino Arévalo (Rome, 1794), reprinted in Jacques Paul Migne's *Patrologia Latina* vol. xix.

- Johann Huemer (Vienna, 1885).

- Victoria Panagl (Bearb.), Sedulius, *Opera Omnia, Ex Recensione Iohannis Huemer* (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 10), Wien, 2007, XLVII, 532 S.

- Springer, Carl P. (2013), *Sedulius, The Paschal Song and Hymns*, Ancient Israel and Its Literature, vol. 35, SBL Press, ISBN 978-1589837447